

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

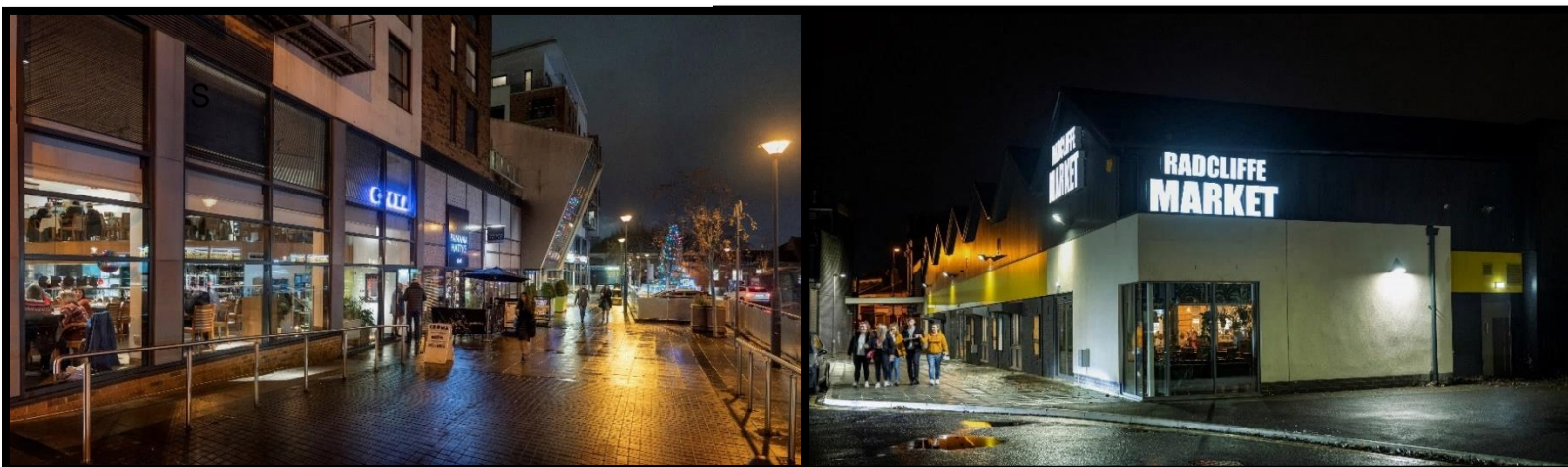
Bury
Council



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FOREWORD

Bury Council's Scrutiny Committees have continued their role of scrutinising and reviewing the work of the Executive and services of the Local Authority. The work of these bodies has ranged from pre-scrutiny of new policy initiatives prior to consideration by the Executive, to monitoring and holding departments accountable for aspects of service provision, including Ofsted findings and regeneration work, and gathering information from Departments about their work and resources.

Over the past 12 months, the three Committees have undertaken thematic and in-depth reviews that have provided positive and effective scrutiny in terms of policy development, service reviews, and service development. For example, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Housing Subgroup to facilitate the transition of Six Town Housing to an internal housing service within the Council. They have also provided effective scrutiny of the Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth during the development of the Regeneration Plans, demonstrating the Committee's role in holding the Cabinet Member accountable in real time on issues important to the public.

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee established two standing items to regularly monitor improvement within the Children and Young People Directorate: SEND and the Improvement Plan. This has provided the committee with assurances as to the Council's actions to monitor, review and improve services for the people of Bury.

The Health Scrutiny Committee has emphasized collaboration and information sharing between Greater Manchester-wide committees and Bury. Sessions with the GMCA HS and NCA committees highlight Bury's integration within a broader system. Key themes for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) include Population Health and Access to health care services..The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to be involved

in Strategy development and received regular updates with regards to regeneration in the Borough.

Throughout the year, steps have been taken to encourage greater collaborative working across the three Scrutiny Committees. A dedicated meeting for the three Scrutiny Chairs has been continued and embedded. An example of the good practice achieved is the invitation extended to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to attend Health Scrutiny to discuss the Locality Plan. Additionally, the Chairs of both the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Health Scrutiny Committee attended the Overview and Scrutiny (Budget) Committee. This enabled all committees to work collaboratively. Along with the chair of Health Scrutiny attending Children and Young peoples Scrutiny and vice versa.

Furthermore, Will Blandamer, Executive Director for Health and Adult Care, and Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care, have been actively participating in the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. This collaborative approach has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of the scrutiny process, ensuring that all relevant perspectives are considered.

Thanks are extended to the Elected Members, Education representatives, and Co-opted Members of all the Scrutiny Panels and Commissions and the Sub-Groups, as well as the Directors, Officers, Internal and External Partners, and Community Representatives involved in the Scrutiny process, for their hard work over the past 12 months and look forward to the challenges ahead.



Councillor Dene Vernon,
Chair for Overview and
Scrutiny Committee



Councillor Ciaran Boles,
Chair for Children and
Young People Scrutiny
Committee



Councillor Elizabeth Fitzgerald
Chair for Health Scrutiny
Committee



BACKGROUND

This Annual Report summarises the activities of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and highlights some of the key achievements of the past year.

Throughout the year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have tackled a wide and varied work programme. They have engaged with Cabinet Members and other external partners prior to decisions being taken, holding them accountable for service areas and policy development.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN BURY

Overview and Scrutiny Committees are an important part of the way we make decisions. Although they have no Executive powers, the scrutiny process does allow Members to explore issues in depth and help to influence decisions through recommendations to the Cabinet or Full Council.

In Bury, the role of scrutiny bodies can be broken down into these two main functions: -

HOLDING THE CABINET TO ACCOUNT

This involves scrutinising decisions before they are implemented by way of 'Call-in' to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for debate. The effect of a 'Call-in' is to suspend the decision until the Scrutiny Committee has had the opportunity to consider the implications of the decision and, where appropriate, to offer comments back to the Cabinet.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This involves Scrutiny Committees undertaking reviews of functions within their individual remits leading to recommendations to the Cabinet, and to assist in the development of future policies and strategies.



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

This Committee is set up to scrutinise Cabinet decisions and Council performance, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee operates within the following terms of reference:

- To review and scrutinise the decisions made, or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions.
- To review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and all service areas.
- To set up, appoint and monitor Overview Project Groups (set up to carry out reviews of policies, services or the impact of decisions).
- To make recommendations to the Cabinet and/or appropriate Committee and/or Council arising from the outcome of the Scrutiny process.
- To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.
- Oversight of the provision, planning and management of the assets and audit arrangements.
- Oversight of the Council's corporate plans and strategies and the monitoring of the corporate plan and departmental plans.
- To scrutinise outside bodies and partners relevant to the Council.
- To receive all reports from external inspectors.

As well as:

- Budget and policy framework matters
- Statutory flood risk management scrutiny powers

- Statutory community safety and policing scrutiny powers
- Services within the business and regeneration directorate
- Services within the corporate core/Corporate performance

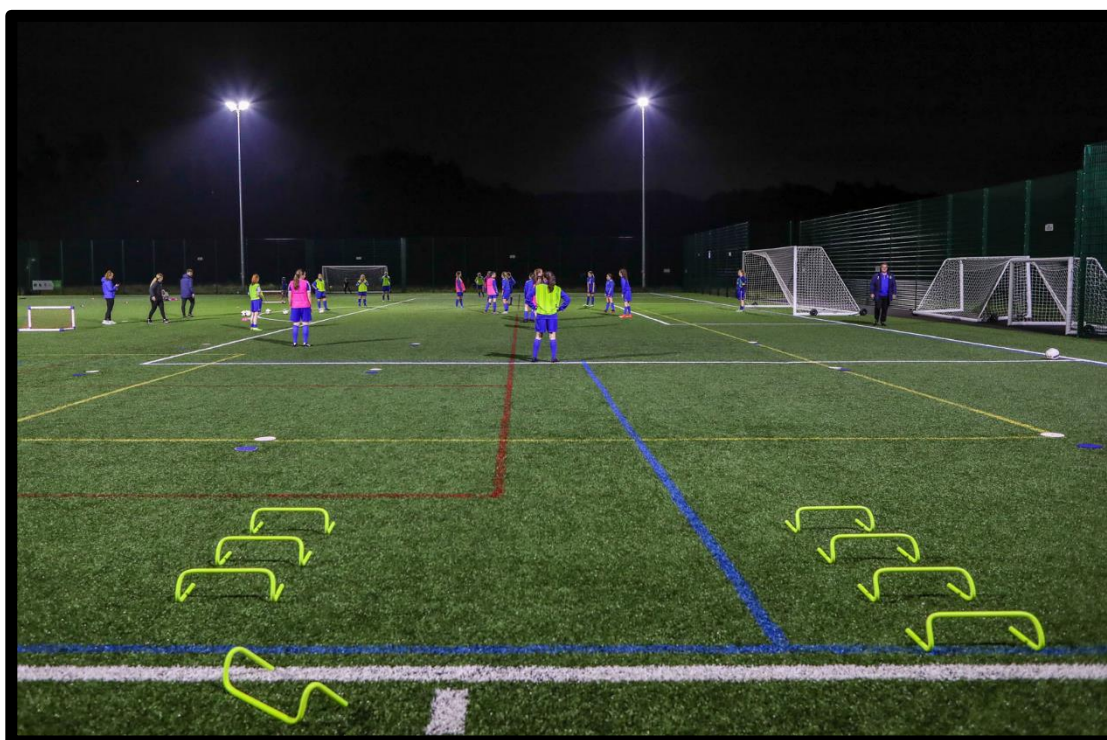


HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A dedicated Health Scrutiny Committee was set up to scrutinise partner organisations on issues relevant to the residents of the Borough. Full terms of reference are.

To review the policies and performance of the Council and external organisations in relation to the following areas:

- Adult social care (including adult safeguarding)
- Health and wellbeing board
- Housing
- Public health
- Adults and Communities budget and policy framework
- Statutory health scrutiny powers including the review and scrutiny of any matter relating to the planning provision and operation of health services for children and young people, including transitional health care services, affecting the area and to make reports and recommendations on these matters



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A dedicated Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee was set up to scrutinise children and young people issues relevant to the residents of the Borough. Full terms of reference are:

To review the policies and performance of the Council and external organisations in relation to the following areas:

- Education and Schools
- Children and Young People Support and Safeguarding Services
- Children and Young People Specialist Services
- To scrutinise individual Cabinet decisions relating to the above areas.
- To monitor the Council's performance in the above areas.

To scrutinise statutory inspection reports and oversee the implementation of any recommendations arising from such reports:

- Transitional arrangements between children and adult services
- Statutory education scrutiny powers

OVERVIEW PROJECT GROUPS

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is responsible for setting up and monitoring reviews carried out by Overview Project Groups. These Groups are tasked with reviewing policy areas with a view to making recommendations that will ultimately result in service improvements.

During the municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Housing Subgroup to support the crossover from Six town Housing being welcomed into the council's internal services. The group is responsible for doing in-depth scrutiny of Housing services reports for the Council. The group was developed as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt they did not have sufficient time within the usual cohort of meetings to provide rigorous scrutiny of these topics.



KEY OUTCOMES

During 2024/2025 the Council's Scrutiny Committees and Overview Project Groups have looked at a wide range of topics and issues. Various methods have been used to examine and investigate issues which have resulted in positive outcomes in terms of policy development and holding decision makers to account.

Housing Sub Committee

This was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2024. Members of the group supported by Strategic Leads within the Department have met on five occasions and the areas of focus were as follows:

- Housing transition updates
- Housing allocations policy
- Housing services performance report (*This went to all the meetings as a standard item demonstrating the overall 'health' of the housing service for each individual month and included updates on the Springs Estate*)
- Quarterly performance booklet
- Anti-social behaviour
- Complaints
- Mock inspection report (By Altair)
- Homelessness

Members were provided with reports and presentations at the meetings and offered constructive scrutiny of performance and delivery within the Council's housing sector. At each meeting, Members asked several questions and could also relate to real-life casework enquiries from residents who accessed the housing service.

Feedback from the Housing Sub-Group was particularly valuable. The Sub-Group's efforts have led to several improvements, and it has been decided that the Sub-Group will continue its work to ensure ongoing enhancements in housing services.

In addition to the above, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee invited Detective Superintendent Stuart Brown to inform the Committee on Crime and Disorder within the Borough including plans for tackling continued issues within local area. Along with the Children's Scrutiny Committee inviting Detective Superintendent Kirsty Oliver the Bury District Commander to attend to discuss the Child First Policing policy and to discuss the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) team in Bury.

The Chairs of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health Scrutiny Committee played an active role in the housing inspection and mock CQC inspections. Their involvement provided valuable oversight and ensured a robust and transparent evaluation process.

DECISIONS CALLED IN 2024/25

Under the Council's Constitution, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, and Health Scrutiny Committee can call in decisions made by the Cabinet, individual Cabinet Members, and key decisions made by officers. This ensures decisions are carefully reviewed and accountable.

In 2024/25, no decisions were called in by any of the Scrutiny Committees. This shows that the scrutiny process has been effective. By thoroughly reviewing proposed decisions, the committees have ensured that all actions taken by the Cabinet and officers meet the Council's goals and legal requirements.

The committees have conducted detailed reviews, consultations, and discussions, addressing any concerns before final decisions are made. This initiative-taking approach has eliminated the need for formal call-ins, highlighting the committees' dedication to transparency, accountability, and good governance within the Council.

SCRUTINY CHAIR BRIEFINGS

During the municipal year 2021/22 a networking group of the three Scrutiny Chairs was established. This group continued in the year 2024/25 and built on the good work already established. This group brought together the Children and Young People Scrutiny Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Chair, Health Scrutiny Chair the Senior Scrutiny Officer and the Monitoring Officer. These meetings took place and covered the following topics: Scrutiny Training, the Annual Report, Budget Briefings and joint working between Committee's.

The group is an opportunity for the Chairs of each Committee to share in successes and problems whilst promoting good practice and support to one another. During the municipal year of 2024/25 the group discussed the following topics:

- Chair and Cabinet Member relationships.
- Cross-Scrutiny work
- Budget Papers for Overview and Scrutiny
- Joint work between Children and Young People Scrutiny and Health Scrutiny
- Key items considered at respective Committees.
- Forward Planner's attached and Training and Support
- Scrutiny Annual Report



SCRUTINY TRAINING

The Scrutiny Committees were invited to attend multiple offers of Scrutiny Training over the municipal year. Scrutiny Members were invited to take part in Scrutiny Specific training:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Training
- Finance Training (All Committees)
- Adult Safeguarding Awareness Training
- Safeguarding Adults Training
- Overview of Health and Care Landscape

Other sessions have also been made available to Committee Members though the LGA and Northwest Employers the sessions explored common challenges, issues as well as shared opportunities.

In 2025, the Local Government Association (LGA) will host a session for all scrutiny members, including both existing and new committee members. The session will cover key topics such as roles and responsibilities, best practices, legislative updates, and case studies. It will also include interactive workshops and networking opportunities.

FURTHER WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested updates from the relevant Cabinet Members in respect of the following Council services and themes:

Regeneration Updates:

The committee regularly receives updates on the various regeneration projects across the borough. These updates provide assurance that the projects are progressing well and highlight the diligent efforts of officers in ensuring the success of these initiatives.

By displaying the exciting ventures, listed below, the updates keep the community informed and engaged. They also foster transparency and accountability, building trust among residents and stakeholders.

Overall, these updates are crucial for maintaining momentum and ensuring that all plans are well-coordinated and delivering the intended benefits to the borough.

- Local Plan
- Northern Gateway
- Regeneration Updates
 - Radcliffe Hub
 - Prestwich Village
 - Bury Mill Gate
 - Bury Market and 'Flexi Hall'
 - Housing Development

Communities Updates:

The committee received a positive update from Greater Manchester Police (GMP) regarding community safety. This briefing allowed the committee to scrutinize both the cabinet member responsible for community safety and GMP itself, providing assurances about GMP's efforts in maintaining a safe community.

Key points from the update included GMP's crime reduction initiatives, technological advancements, and collaborative efforts with local organizations. The committee's engagement ensured accountability and transparency, highlighting the importance of oversight in public safety initiatives.

- Community Safety Update
- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Crime and Disorder

Housing Updates

The committee has been given a housing update which has been

- 12 Month Housing update
- Housing Subgroup update to the Committee

Finance Updates:

- Year End/Quarter Four Corporate Plan Performance Report 2023/24 and submission of the productivity plan
- Budget Update Report
- Year End Outturn Financial Position
- Quarter 2 Finance Report
- Housing Revenue Account Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan and Revenue Budget
- Council Tax Base and Resolution and Collection Fund Surplus Deficit Report
- 2025-26 Treasury Management Strategy
- 2025-26 to 2027-28 Capital Strategy
- Dedicated Schools Grant
- Budget 2025.26 EQIA
- Chief Finance Officer Statement
- Savings Templates

Corporate Updates:

- Health and Safety Annual Report
- Corporate Plan

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

In its ongoing performance monitoring role, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, together with the Housing Sub-Group, has consistently received comprehensive and insightful reports concerning Housing Services. These reports have provided detailed analyses across key areas, including Corporate Performance, Financial Monitoring, and Corporate Core departmental performance indicators. They have also addressed critical aspects of Council Tax collection and arrears recovery, with a particular emphasis on housing-related challenges such as tenant arrears, housing benefit overpayments, and the overall effectiveness of housing support services.

The valuable input and expertise of council officers have been instrumental in shaping these reports. Their thorough preparation, clarity of presentation, and responsiveness to member queries have significantly enhanced the Sub-Group's understanding and oversight capabilities. The Housing Sub-Group would like to extend its sincere thanks to all officers involved for their continued dedication and professionalism. Their contributions have been greatly appreciated and were very well received by members, reinforcing the collaborative spirit that underpins effective scrutiny and service improvement.

HEALTH SCRUTINY

The Health Scrutiny Committee requested updates from the relevant Cabinet Members and officers regarding the following services and topics:

- Health and Care Update
- Elective Care Updates
- Health Inequalities Strategy Updates
- Workforce Updates
- Urgent Care and Winter Preparedness
- Adult Social Care Provider Workforce Support Updates
- Bury ICP Locality Performance Updates
- Health Inequalities Strategy updates

- Updates from Bury Healthwatch
- Adult Social Care Updates
- Women's Health update
- Local Government Association Update
- Your Medicines Matter Update
- Locality Plan Update
- Pharmacy First Update

The Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee emphasised the strong collaboration between the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the GM Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, particularly in their joint review of NHS finances at the Greater Manchester level.

She also shared valuable insights from external meetings she attended, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) Joint Health Scrutiny meeting, and the GMCA Health Scrutiny Committee. These updates reassured members about the breadth of work being undertaken beyond Bury and highlighted Bury's strong performance against national benchmarks.

To support effective scrutiny, pre-meetings were held with officers ahead of formal committee sessions. These provided an opportunity to explore complex issues in more depth and enhance members' understanding. The Chair expressed her thanks to officers for their efforts in making reports and presentations more accessible, user-friendly, and easier to follow.

Throughout the year, additional meetings were convened to address specific issues, such as a dedicated session on adult ADHD services. This was supported by a public engagement initiative (February–March 2024) to inform the review of ADHD service provision across Greater Manchester.

A joint session between the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the GM Joint Health Scrutiny Committee further enabled coordinated oversight of service reconfiguration and financial planning. These efforts were strengthened by the strategic input of Will Blandamer, Deputy Place-Based Lead for NHS Greater

Manchester, who provided system-wide insights into transformation and benchmarking through the NCA.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee requested updates from the relevant Cabinet Members on various Council services and themes, including:

- Early Help and Social Care Improvement Journey Update
- Bury Local Area SEND Inspection Report
- Bury Priority Impact Plan
- EHCP Monitoring and Provisions
- Improvement Plan Updates
- Youth Justice Plan
- SEND Improvement Plan
- School Results Update
- Changing School Landscape
- Unvalidated Outcomes of Attainment
- Detailed Report on Complex Safeguarding and Missing Response
- Early Years and Provision
- Youth Justice
- Child First Policing Strategy

The Committee has greatly benefited from regular updates and strong collaboration with the health sector, thanks to the ongoing involvement of Will Blandamer, Executive Director for Health and Adult Care, and Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care. Their consistent attendance and support particularly on matters relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have been invaluable. Their contributions have significantly

enriched discussions, especially given the overlap between Health and Children's Services.

The inclusion of two standing agenda items, SEND and the Improvement Plan has further strengthened the Committee's ability to monitor progress. These additions have provided clear, ongoing evidence of improvement and have reassured members about the nature and impact of the changes being implemented.

The Committee also welcomed Detective Kirsty Oliver, District Commander for Greater Manchester Police, who provided an insightful update on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Child First Policing policy. Her attendance was particularly well received, offering valuable reassurance about the role and performance of GMP in Bury. This marked the first time the police have attended the Committee, and their involvement was seen as a highly positive and welcome development.

WORK OF GREATER MANCHESTER SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

For the second consecutive year, Councillors Imran Rizvi and Russell Bernstein have served on the GMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee. In its new format, this Committee provides oversight and challenges the decisions made by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, while also advising on policy development for issues affecting the entire region. Over the past year, the Committee has been particularly focused on integrating all aspects of the latest devolution deal, including opportunities for post-16 technical skills and the Housing First initiative. Members have also contributed to setting priorities for temporary accommodation, digital inclusion, and the GMCA's culture fund.

Representatives from Bury Council have had the opportunity to participate in regular briefings on every aspect of the GMCA's work, enhancing their knowledge and

enabling them to be effective in their scrutiny roles. They serve as a vital link between local and sub-regional scrutiny, actively shaping the Committee's work programme based on the issues faced by residents not only in Bury but across Greater Manchester.

Councillor Liz Fitzgerald was appointed Vice Chair of the GM Joint Health Scrutiny Committee last June, after serving on the Committee for two years. Her leadership has been invaluable, especially as the Committee's remit significantly expanded at the start of this municipal year. Meeting twice as often as before, the Committee now plays a crucial role in determining the required consultations for substantial service changes, providing feedback to the Integrated Care Board (ICB) on project-specific engagement and consultation approaches, suggesting implementation methods, and ensuring the delivery of agreed engagement and consultation plans.

In addition to these responsibilities, the Committee ensures that the ICB and all GM health providers are held accountable by our local communities. Members have chosen to scrutinise issues such as elective care wait times, access to primary care, and the introduction of digital solutions, among other topics. Through Councillor Fitzgerald, members of Bury's Health Scrutiny Committee are actively engaged in the Committee's work and have selected topics for their own further consideration.

NEXT STEPS

Moving into the new municipal year of 2025/26, several new or improved processes will be implemented to enhance the transition into a new Committee year and ensure members are well briefed on scheduled items.

Firstly, LGA training for the whole committee will be introduced to provide comprehensive development opportunities for all members, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle their responsibilities effectively.

Secondly, Chairs, lead officers, and the respective Cabinet Members of all three committees will be invited to participate in forward planning meetings for each

Committee. This initiative aims to avoid duplication and encourage collaborative working across different committees.

Thirdly, agendas and papers will be sent to all Scrutiny Chairs to keep them informed about upcoming discussion items, fostering better preparation and engagement.

Additionally, more Committee-specific training will be opened to all Committees and their respective members to support networking and shared learning. This will include targeted sessions to address specific needs and challenges faced by each Committee.

Housing collaboration meetings will be held across all committees to ensure a unified approach to housing issues, promoting consistency and shared objectives.

Efforts will be made to align the Cabinet and Corporate Plan forward plans, ensuring that Committee work is in sync with broader organizational goals.

A section around policy briefings will be introduced to align with national headlines, keeping members updated on relevant policy changes and their implications.

Sub-group continuation will alternate between housing and performance, allowing for focused discussions and actions in these critical areas.

Finally, there will be a strong focus on the audit improvement plan, which has been a statutory recommendation. This will involve regular reviews and updates to ensure compliance and continuous improvement.

Work programmes at the start of the municipal year will be developed to outline what needs to be scheduled, ensuring a well-organized and efficient approach to Committee work throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

The Scrutiny function in Bury has a strong foundation, demonstrated by numerous examples of thorough reviews and effective partnership working. The Scrutiny Committees will continue to operate with a thematic focus, concentrating on specific areas of interest to enhance and provide effective scrutiny.

All Scrutiny Chairs have reflected on the relationships among the three Scrutiny Committees and have endorsed the continuation of the Chairs of the Health Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee being members of each other's Committees. This approach fosters cross-working between the Health and Children and Young People directorates, promoting a collaborative environment. Additionally, the inclusion of all Chairs at the Overview and Scrutiny Budget meeting has been recognized as beneficial, ensuring comprehensive oversight and coordination.

The Scrutiny functions are continually evolving, with ongoing improvements and strengthened relationships. This dynamic approach ensures that the Scrutiny Committees remain effective and responsive to the needs of the community, driving positive change and accountability.

Appendix 1 - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – Work Programme 2024/25

Appendix 2 - Health Scrutiny - Work Programme 2024/25

Appendix 3 – Overview and Scrutiny – Work Programme 2024/25

Appendix 5 - Overview and Scrutiny – Housing Subgroup Work Programme 2024/25

Appendix 6 - Overview and Scrutiny – Housing Subgroup Highlight Report 2024/25